



Canadian Slavonic Papers

The Revival of Political Idealism in Poland

Author(s): ADAM BROMKE

Source: *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 1982), pp. 335-357

Published by: [Canadian Association of Slavists](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40868057>

Accessed: 10/06/2014 22:17

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Canadian Association of Slavists and Canadian Slavonic Papers are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

ADAM BROMKE

The Revival of Political Idealism in Poland

The crisis of 1980-81 fits neatly into the peculiar pattern of Poland's history over the last two hundred years.¹ Since the country's decline as a great power in the eighteenth century the Poles, threatened by stronger neighbours to the east and west, have desperately endeavoured to protect their independence. Polish politics have become characterized by *Primat der Aussenpolitik*—the primacy of foreign over domestic events. This situation has traditionally provoked two different responses. The idealists, or “romantics,” as the Poles call them, give first priority to the restoration of the country's independence. They advocate a relentless struggle against the occupying power and have been prepared to undertake great sacrifices. In contrast, the realists, or “positivists,” advocate the acceptance of a limited autonomy; they have not abandoned the ultimate goal of Poland's freedom from foreign rule, but their first concern has been to protect the nation from repeated and futile losses and, instead, to secure for it as normal a development as possible.²

This division has produced a cyclical pattern in Polish history. After each period of idealistic struggle there has ensued a phase of realism that has ended only when a new generation that no longer remembers the sufferings and defeats of its parents attempts to expand the nation's freedom once again. The Poles have naturally tried to synchronize their efforts with developments on the international scene. At times they have failed, but at times—as in 1918—they have succeeded in restoring their independent state.

1. The developments in Poland in the 1970s as well as the early stages of the upheaval in 1980-81 are described in some detail in my *Poland: The Last Decade* (Oakville, Ont., 1981); while the suppression of “Solidarity” and the early stages of martial rule are dealt with in my “Socialism with a Martial Face,” *The World Today*, 38, No. 7-8 (July-August 1982), 264-73.

2. The dichotomy between idealism and realism in Poland's modern history is presented at length in my *Poland's Politics: Idealism vs. Realism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

The author gratefully acknowledges a research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada which enabled him to visit Poland in the spring of 1982.

I

From the Napoleonic wars until the disastrous uprising against Russia in 1863 idealism was dominant, although after the 1890s it was on the decline, while from then until World War I realism prevailed. From 1918 to 1945 the pendulum swung back to idealism. During World War II the Poles waged a desperate struggle for independence and in those efforts they looked for assistance from the Western democracies. At the end of the war, however, and especially after the ill-fated Warsaw uprising in 1944, they once more moved towards realism.

Three major factors contributed to this development. First, there was a spontaneous revulsion against the continuation of a futile military struggle. The Poles became aware of the tremendous losses they had suffered during the war and of the need to protect the nation from any further bloodshed. Second, the shift of Polish territory at the end of World War II to the west, which led to a bitter and prolonged dispute with Germany, made the Poles look to Russia for protection. Finally, there was the reality of Soviet power in East-Central Europe and the inability, or unwillingness, of the West to do anything about it.

Under the impact of these experiences the Poles embraced realism in the 1950s and the 1960s. They accepted the fact that, at least for the time being, the restoration of Poland's independence was not possible and they strove to achieve a compromise with the Soviet Union. This mood undoubtedly contributed to the peaceful outcome of the upheaval in 1956, which stopped short of overthrowing the Communist system and settled for moderate—although not inconsequential—improvements in it.

Several significant changes, domestic as well as international, have occurred in the last quarter of a century to move the Poles away from realism and back to idealism. First of all a younger generation, free of the defeatist memories of World War II, has come of age. It is more restive under restrictions on its freedom, and bolder in articulating demands for political changes, than its parents. In this respect the new atmosphere in the country was signalled as early as the students' demonstrations of 1968.

The students' rebellion was crushed, but it was not in vain. From among the student activists of 1968, hardened by years in imprisonment, there emerged in the mid-1970s many leaders of the democratic opposition. Various civil rights' groups were openly founded, *samizdat* publications proliferated, and the Flying University—offering courses on a wide variety of subjects free from Communist control—came into existence. After the workers' riots in 1970, and especially after 1976, the opposition consciously strove to merge its activities with those of the working class.

Changes in the international sphere during the 1970s also contributed to the Poles' shift from realism to idealism. The intensity of the Polish-German border dispute diminished considerably, and the 1970 treaty between Warsaw and Bonn, although it still does not provide for a final recognition of the existing boundary, represented a milestone in this direction. The normalization of diplomatic relations between the two states paved the way for extensive economic and cultural contacts. The rise of the dissident movement in the USSR inspired Polish hopes for impending changes in that country, and the Polish democratic opposition even tried to establish cooperation with the Russian dissidents. The Poles clearly hoped that this was the beginning of a broad popular upheaval which would bring about major changes in the Soviet Union.

Finally, the Poles were influenced by the rise of East-West detente. Many believed that after Moscow had signed the Helsinki Accord in 1975 a Soviet intervention in Poland was no longer feasible. They also expected that, after years of expanding its economic ties with Poland, the West would help that country out of its crisis. Some Poles, moreover, thought that the position of their country was enhanced by the Sino-Soviet dispute. A USSR threatened in Asia, they reasoned, would be more likely to offer concessions in Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, the elevation of Karol Cardinal Wojtyła to the Throne of St. Peter, and his triumphal visit to Poland in 1979, greatly aroused national pride. Led by its venerable Primate, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, the Catholic church not only demanded the expansion of religious freedom, but also championed the cause of civil rights. The traditional gap between the Catholics and the liberal intellectuals was largely overcome.

The strength of Polish patriotic sentiments was fully revealed during the summer of 1980. Striking factories were draped with national flags and often displayed portraits of John Paul II, while the workers—most of whom had been born and raised in People's Poland—wore red and white armbands reminiscent of those of the wartime resistance. The Poles revealed themselves to be grimly determined to press on with the reform of their political system.

II

The direct reason for the popular upheaval in Poland in 1980-81 is, of course, the profound and persistent failure of the Communist system. The Soviet inspired, and Soviet imposed, political model simply did not fit the country. Regime after regime went down in disgrace: in 1956 the Stalinists', in 1970 Gomułka's, and in 1980 Gierek's. Each time promises of reform were made, and each time they were not kept. The situation was

made worse by the ostensibly libertarian and egalitarian character of the Communist ideology. The gap between promise and reality was apparent and steadily widening. By 1980 the ruling Communist party had lost all its credibility. This time the Poles were determined to take events into their own hands—to participate in the reform of the communist system and, if necessary, to replace it with democracy.

There is no question, however, that the crisis has been greatly intensified by coinciding with a new transition from realism to idealism. This has come about spontaneously with the rise of a new generation. This is not just a demographic phenomenon. There is also apparent a remarkable continuity of political traditions. For the young Poles *consciously* bypassed the post-war realist phase and sought inspiration in the preceding idealist period.

The young generation derives its knowledge of history from a variety of sources, and, above all, that traditional bastion of Polish nationalism, the family. Children were fed on stories of their fathers' wartime exploits and, especially, those in the legendary Home Army. While their mothers worked, they were reared by their grandmothers in a strong Catholic tradition. The church too was a custodian of national traditions: when on the one hundredth anniversary of the 1963 uprising Professor Stanisław Stomma, a Catholic politician and later a leading exponent of realism, published an essay critical of the insurrection, he was rebuked by Cardinal Wyszyński.³

An important role was also played by Polish emigres in the West, particularly by the followers of the pre-war Piłsudski regime and the Polish Socialist Party—which in the 1930s was in opposition, but which originated from the same idealist roots. In London there continued to exist a government-in-exile, where General Władysław Anders, a victor in the 1944 battle of Monte Cassino, was a dominant figure until his death in 1970. The Piłsudskyites also occupied many key positions in the various Western radio stations broadcasting to Poland.

An even more significant role was played by the Literary Centre in Paris, whose editor-in-chief, Jerzy Giedroyc, is an ardent Piłsudkyite. Books, historical materials, and a monthly, *Kultura*, issued by the Centre have been systematically smuggled into Poland and have exerted considerable influence on the young leaders of the democratic opposition. As Adam Michnik wrote in 1982 under a pseudonym from internment: "The

3. Stanisław Stomma, "Z kurzem krwi bratniej," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 20 June 1963.

emigration returned to the homeland. Its books were increasingly smuggled across the border, they were passed from person to person and hidden from the vigilant eyes of the police. The emigration brought knowledge about the world, the truth about national history, the leading works of contemporary literature and non-censored reflections about Polish hopes and hopelessness.”⁴

At the same time the National Democrats, traditionally the strongest realist political movement, have suffered an eclipse. In London in 1945 they participated in the anti-Yalta government of protest together with the Piłsudkyites and the socialists but played a relatively minor role there. And in Poland during the Stalinist period they were exposed to particularly harsh persecutions, with most of their leaders either liquidated or broken.⁵ Only in the late 1970s did some small groups of National Democrats reappear in Poland. The Christian Democrats in the emigration split into several factions and have never exerted major influence. And at home since 1956 they have been overshadowed by the Catholic “Znak” group, which initially adhered to realism, but in the 1970s moved closer to idealism.⁶ Individual former Christian Democrats, however, and notably a highly respected lawyer, Włodysław Siła-Nowicki, did achieve prominent positions in “Solidarity,” where they have tried to exert a moderating influence.

Paradoxically, the Polish Communist Party also contributed to the revival of political idealism. Although since World War II it has consistently espoused a thoroughly realist programme of cooperation with the USSR, it also has an idealist tradition dating back to its early revolutionary struggles. The Communists’ blind hatred of the National Democrats has largely stemmed from this source. This heroic phase of the party’s history has been played up by the Communists to legitimize their staying in power and, especially, to catch the imagination of the younger generation.

In the 1960s the “partisans” faction in the Communist party adopted similar tactics by presenting themselves as the true heirs of the idealist

4. Andrzej Zagóza, “Czy emigrować?”, *Kultura* (Paris), No. 6/417 (June 1982), pp. 68-9.

5. For a first-hand account of the persecutions of the National Democrats in the post-war years see Leon Mirecki, “Porównania,” *Ład*, 23 August 1981.

6. It was marked by an article by Stanisław Stomma, “Tragedie polskiego realizmu” in *Ruch oporu* (Paris, 1977), pp. 229-35.

tradition.⁷ Disregarding their realist programme of close alliance with the Soviet Union, they hoped to cash in on their wartime exploits. In this respect they aped the Piłsudskyites who deliberately exploited their struggles during World War I to enhance their political position in inter-war Poland.⁸ This tactic, however, boomeranged. Since the Communist partisans' activities were relatively insignificant by comparison with those of the non-Communist Home Army, and since it was the latter which stood for Poland's complete independence, it was the Home Army's legend that was enhanced.

Furthermore, to promote alliance with Russia the danger to Poland from Germany was strongly underlined by the Communists, and there was an endless stream of books, films, and television spectacles depicting Nazi atrocities. Naturally, young Poles began to ask what the Soviets did in the war, and this brought up awkward questions about the USSR's invasion of Poland in 1939, the murder of the captured Polish officers in Katyń in 1940, and the Soviet refusal to assist the Warsaw uprising in 1944. The young usually received the answers from their parents, or, if they did not, the generation gap only widened. It is probably not accidental that among the leaders of the democratic opposition were an unusually large number of children of high Communist officials.

As a result of all these factors, "... the self-image of the Polish society remained almost the same as it was in inter-war society," as a prominent sociologist and educator, Professor Jan Szczepański, observed in 1969. The traditional national values, such as "individualism, sense of honor, pride in national glory, a cult of national heroes, and patriotism in the sense of dedication to national interests," were preserved largely intact.⁹ In those circumstances it is not surprising that in the 1970s the young Poles turned back to political idealism.

7. A systematic effort at presenting the Communists as true successors of the idealist tradition was undertaken in a popular historical study by Zbigniew Żałuski, *Siedem polskich grzechów głównych* (Warsaw, 1962).

8. For instance, in the wartime memoirs of the "partisans' " leader, Mieczysław Moczar, *Barwy walki* (Warsaw, 1968); the book, incidentally, was compulsory reading for Grade 8 students.

9. Jan Szczepański, *Polish Society* (New York, 1970), p. 193.

III

The leaders of the democratic opposition, many of whom have assumed influential positions in "Solidarity," do not like being labelled political idealists. They consider themselves rather as true realists, and so they have tended to disregard warnings that they are going too far and too fast. In turn, they have accused their critics of being extreme realists—people who believe that no changes at all are possible and, in effect, uphold the *status quo*.

In a discussion between this writer and the activists of the democratic opposition in Warsaw on 28 May 1978, Jan Józef Lipski, a well-known literary critic and a member of the Committee for the Defence of the Workers, categorically denied that he and his colleagues were political idealists: they were not people "... who engage in clandestine activities, who arm themselves and who plan one day to attack the Central Committee [headquarters] with five machine guns." Instead, he asserted, their endeavours are more akin to those of the Polish realists of the late nineteenth century. The democratic opposition assists people who are persecuted, spreads political education, and encourages social activism. "For us," he concluded, "this is realism and not romanticism."¹⁰ Lipski was echoed by another leader of KOR, Jacek Kuroń, who pointed out that opposition activities were aimed at developing institutions independent of the government, intensifying pressure upon it and this way, within the limits of existing possibilities, transforming the system. This, Kuroń claimed, was realism *par excellence*.

Another prominent KOR activist, Adam Michnik, took a different approach, arguing that opposition activities were "thoroughly realistic because they produce concrete results." He proceeded to illustrate his point by asking "who were the realists in Greece in the early 1970s: the people who accepted the colonels' rule or those who opposed it?" Today "... the dissidents are in power and the colonels are in jail." A leader of the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights, Leszek Moczulski, observed that the Poles still worried about the danger of a Soviet inter-

10. Lipski's statement, as well as those by other democratic opposition leaders who participated in the discussion on 28 May 1978, are excerpted from a tape recording in the possession of this writer. For a report on the meeting in the *samizdat* press see "U Walendowskich; spotkanie z profesorem Bromke," *Zapis*, No. 7 (July 1978); reprinted by *Index on Censorship* (London, 1979), pp. 183-4.

vention. Now, however, a new situation had emerged in the international sphere so that the scenario of “. . . Soviet tanks entering Warsaw simply no longer holds true.”

Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Catholic journalist who played a prominent role in the activities of the democratic opposition, claimed that the realist stance is in fact shared by the Polish people. The nation, he wrote in 1979, “. . . does not expect or demand things which are impossible and, despite accusations of romanticism, has demonstrated . . . that it is aware where the line is drawn between what is feasible, and what is not.” But it also “. . . needs an opening, a breath of fresh air, it deserves to be treated as being mature and co-responsible for the fate of the country.”¹¹

A popular writer linked with KOR, Andrzej Szczypiorski, offered similar assurances. While admitting that the Poles tended to look to history for inspiration, he dismissed the entire dichotomy between idealism and realism as irrelevant. There is no parallel between the position of Poland in the nineteenth century and that today, he asserted. Both domestic and external circumstances are completely different. The democratic opposition, he claimed, “. . . understands full well that Poland is an important element . . . of the Soviet bloc, and that Polish sovereignty will remain drastically curtailed for a long time to come.”¹² All it wanted to accomplish was to overcome the existing apathy and to revive authentic social activity which would restrict the power of the totalitarian bureaucracy. Szczypiorski indicated, however, that he was not unaware of the difficulties involved, for he added that the realization of these goals would require at least partial restoration of Poland's sovereignty.

The initial demands of “Solidarity” in the summer of 1980 were, indeed, quite moderate. Changes in the country were to be carried out in a peaceful fashion and they were to remain within the limits of the Communist system. Soon, however, “Solidarity” was caught up in the dynamics of an “incremental revolution.” As its demands for reforms were steadily augmented, the line between what was feasible and what was not became blurred. In the spring of 1981 one of the radical leaders of “Solidarity,” Andrzej Gwiazda, boasted: “We are the true realists, for we have proven that it is possible to achieve the impossible.”¹³

11. Quoted in Jean Ofredo, *Lech Wałęsa czyli polskie lato* (Paris, 1981), p. 95.

12. Andrzej Szczypiorski, “The Limits of Political Realism,” *Survey*, No. 4 (Autumn 1979), p. 23.

13. Statement in a conversation with one of the “Solidarity” advisers as related to this writer.

When on 5 June 1981 the USSR delivered a stern warning to the Polish Communists to bring the situation in the country under control, many “Solidarity” moderates became alarmed. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, by then the editor-in-chief of the “Solidarity” weekly, wrote: “No one can argue today that the danger of solutions that are different from those evolved by ourselves and that would be imposed by force is a figment of the imagination of intimidated people. No one can ignore the gravity of the situation, and play with fire”¹⁴

The appeals of the “Solidarity” moderates, however, fell upon deaf ears and at the free trade unions’ Congress in the early fall the radicals clearly gained the upper hand. By proposing free elections “Solidarity” moved beyond merely trying to reform the Communist system and, in effect, demanded its replacement with democracy, while, by issuing an appeal to the workers in the other Communist states to form free trade unions of their own, it posed a direct challenge to Moscow.

Towards the end of 1981 confrontation between “Solidarity” and the Communist government accelerated rapidly. On 22 November Kuroń announced plans to establish Clubs of the Self-Governing Republic, openly linked to the Warsaw branch of “Solidarity,” whose objective would be to achieve “freedom, justice and independence;” the meeting of the free trade unions’ leaders held in Radom on 3 December warned the government that any attempt on its part to resort to emergency powers would be met by a general strike; and at the meeting of “Solidarity’s” National Commission in Gdańsk on 12 December it was proposed that a referendum testing the popularity of the Jaruzelski government be held early in 1982.

At the meeting in Gdańsk Siła-Nowicki presented the moderates’ position and criticized the radicals. While emphasizing that the primary responsibility for the deepening confrontation rested with the government and not with “Solidarity,” he listed some activities that he considered incompatible with the free trade unions’ original objectives: engaging in demagogic propaganda, providing an umbrella for the activities of various social and, especially, political organizations (in clear violation of the Gdańsk agreement), and preparing for a general strike and street demonstrations which could only lead to the Communist authorities’ invoking emergency powers. He also pointed out that “Solidarity”

14. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, “Obronić polską szansę,” *Solidarność*, 19 June 1981.

propaganda tended to underline the Communist government's weakness, and he warned that "Exaggerating the enemy's strength is less dangerous than underestimating it." The weakness of the government "... is also not in the national interests, if only because of the danger of an external threat." The immediate collapse of all authority might suit the interests of only "... those who are eager to assume political power in Poland."¹⁵

IV

The introduction of martial law on 13 December 1981, the drastic restrictions on personal freedoms, and, especially, the suppression of "Solidarity" produced a profound shock in Polish society that has been compared to the defeat of the 1863 uprising, which marked the watershed between the initial period of idealism and the first phase of realism in Polish history.

In the first issue of the Communist weekly *Polityka* to appear after the declaration of martial law, Daniel Passent drew an explicit parallel. Admitting that about one third of the paper's editorial staff had resigned in protest, he reminded the readers that after the 1863 uprising was crushed some Poles had continued to cling to their adamant positions, while others had modified their stand.¹⁶ One of the leaders of the radical revolutionary faction, Walery Wrotnowski, wrote: "I do not understand a compromising stance To save Poland I see only one way ahead: it is rugged, full of martyrdom and blood all over." At the same time, however, a historian, Julian Klaczko, defended compromise with the occupying powers and argued "... that it is futile to blame only the enemy for the blood of the best of the Polish youths and the tears of so many fathers and mothers The responsibility also belongs to those who started an unequal struggle without sufficient preparation, arms, leaders, or allies."

Even more significant was the article by a prominent historian, Professor Henryk Wereszycki, published on 30 May 1982 in the revived Catholic weekly, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, which drew an indirect parallel between the two epochs. He warned the Poles against defeatism and assured them that their efforts were not in vain. "There is always a tendency," he wrote, "to regard contemporary events as decisively determining the future Yet, what actually happened in the past and what

15. Władysław Siła-Nowicki, "Analiza sytuacji," *Odnova* (London), No. 4 (June 1982), p. 10.

16. Daniel Passent, "Co tam w 'Polityce'," *Polityka*, 20 February 1982.

was born from a past vision are not separate, but add up to a continuity in history The tradition of the uprising [of 1863] was one of the basic elements of the national education. It persisted from the defeat until the regaining of independence [in 1918].”

Wereszycki also pointed to the continuity of the entire idealist tradition. The uprising of 1863 derived its inspiration from the insurrection of 1794; and, in turn, it inspired the Polish military efforts during World War I. “After Poland regained its independence and the Commander-in-Chief [Józef Piłsudski] revived the decoration of *Virtuti Militari*, the first to receive it were the surviving participants of the 1863 uprising.” This, concluded Wereszycki, “. . . teaches us that the Polish nation can survive any defeat and transform it into a future victory.”¹⁷

There are, of course, many similarities between the events of 1863-64 and those of 1980-81. In both cases the Poles strove to free themselves from Russian suzerainty, and on both occasions the international situation seemed propitious to such endeavours. With the accession in 1855 of Alexander II there were hopes for relaxation in the Russian Empire; and with the rise of the dissident movement in the USSR in the late 1960s there were expectations of similar changes. At both times the broader political atmosphere in Europe appeared promising to the Poles. The uprising of 1863 was preceded by the rise of Napoleon III in France and the *risorgimento* in Italy; prior to the upheaval of 1980 there was a period of detente in East-West relations. Finally, in both cases the Poles counted, even if without any real foundation, on the support of the Western powers.

On both occasions too the major role was played by the young, who were split into moderate and radical factions, with the latter ultimately gaining the upper hand. An interesting comparison could also be drawn between the roles of the conservative Polish political leader in 1863, Margrave Aleksander Wielopolski, and of General Wojciech Jaruzelski in 1981. Both enjoyed Russian support, both were ready to go ahead with moderate reforms, but opposed radical changes, and both by their policies profoundly alienated Polish society—although, of course, Jaruzelski’s political role is not over as yet.

17. Henryk Wereszycki, “Znaczenie powstania styczniowego w dziejach narodu polskiego,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 30 May 1982. Professor Wereszycki’s article is even more significant in view of the fact that his past scholarly works presented a much more balanced picture of the dichotomy between idealism and realism. See especially Henryk Wereszycki, *Historia polityczna Polski w dobie popowstaniowej, 1864-1918*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1979).

There are, however, important differences. In 1863 the insurrection was undertaken almost exclusively by the upper classes with the masses of the peasants remaining passive, while in 1980 the working class played a major role in the upheaval. In 1980 the Catholic church enjoyed, and still enjoys, much greater influence in the country than in 1863, when it was relatively easily broken by the Tsarist authorities. Furthermore, the insurrection of 1863 was prepared in the underground, and took the form of a full-fledged military struggle; while "Solidarity" carried out its activities openly and peacefully, and assumed a clandestine character only after the introduction of martial law. Last but not least the casualties suffered by the Poles at the hands of the Russians during the 1863 uprising were so horrendous that they profoundly damaged national life for decades to come; while since the introduction of martial law in 1981 the loss of life has been minimal and the persecutions, at least so far, have remained restricted in their scope. Thus, even though there exists today considerable alienation between the military government and the Polish people, the possibility of their ultimate reconciliation—steadfastly advocated by the Catholic church—must not be ruled out.

It is not impossible, of course, that the present Polish crisis may still end as tragically as the uprising of 1863. This would require, however, considerable intensification of underground resistance culminating in a full-scale uprising and its brutal suppression, presumably with direct Soviet assistance. It is precisely against this danger that the new Primate of Poland, Archbishop Józef Glemp, warned the Poles in a homily on 26 August 1982. He asked his compatriots to keep in mind the lessons of history and pointedly reminded them that the ill-fated 1863 insurrection brought about "annihilation, depression, destruction and, even worse, long-lasting slavery."¹⁸

There is one more capital difference. The events of 1863 marked the end of the first idealist phase in Polish history and ushered in the first realist period; while, in contrast, the upheaval of 1980 brought to an end the second realist phase which began after World War II. Thus, if there are historical parallels with the present situation in Poland, they should be sought in the second idealist period, and especially in its early stages.

18. John Darnton, "Primate Demands Poles Free Walesa," *The New York Times*, 27 August 1982.

V

In 1971 an important book appeared, *The Genealogy of the Irrepressibles*, written from idealist positions *par excellence*. Its author was a young Catholic writer, Bogdan Cywiński, linked with the “Znak” group.¹⁹ The book criticized the traditional association of the Catholic church with the conservative elements in Polish society, and tried to build a bridge between the Catholic and leftist intellectuals. At the same time it offered a comprehensive historical account of the revival of political idealism in Poland at the turn of the century. In dramatic prose it described the fortunes of the “irrepressibles,” who, despite all odds, had resumed the struggle for independence.

Cywiński's book had a considerable impact upon young Poles. In 1981 the “Solidarity” lexicon said of it: “Despite a small edition of 3,500 copies, it was one of the most significant books published in post-war Poland. By presenting the story of two magnificent generations of the intelligentsia, whose heroic efforts were crowned with independence . . . it served as a true inspiration to the generation presently in their thirties It can be said without any exaggeration that it shaped many of the activists of August 1980.”²⁰

Indeed, there is a striking similarity between the activities of the “irrepressibles” at the turn of the century and those in the 1970s. In both cases, in formulating political programmes a significant role was played by the humanists, who tended to appeal to emotion rather than to reason. If the political idealists at the turn of the century derived their inspiration from the neo-romantic literature of “Young Poland,” writers, poets, and composers have also exerted a major influence during the recent Polish political ferment. The literature of protest ranges from the sophisticated prose of Tadeusz Konwicki and the poetry of Stanisław Barańczak to crude, but perhaps therefore even more dramatic, poems composed by simple workers. Music, while expressing the same political sentiments, has also varied from songs maintaining the folk tradition to a graceful composition by Jan Pietrzak, “Let Poland be Poland,” which during the “Solidarity” period became virtually a second national anthem.

The political writings of the contemporary “irrepressibles,” like those of their predecessors, have a strong ethical content. The tone was set by a famous philosopher, Professor Leszek Kołakowski, who, although leaving the country for the West in 1969, became symbolically a member

19. Bogdan Cywiński, *Rodowody niepokornych* (Warsaw, 1971).

20. Solidarność. *Leksykon związkowy* (Gdańsk, 1981), pp. 22-3.

of KOR.²¹ Activists of the democratic opposition have espoused the virtues of integrity, courage, and, if necessary, sacrifice. They have insisted on telling the truth, and nothing but the truth. "For a conquered and enslaved nation," wrote Adam Michnik in 1975, "to affirm moral baseness is stupid, and the upholding of truth and morality in political thinking is not at all naive, but is the only realistic course of action."²²

As is usual in such circumstances, however, there has also been a less appealing aspect to the activities of the democratic opposition. The contemporary "irrepressibles" tend to see the world in terms of black and white and assume entitlement to judge what is right. They have bitterly attacked their realist opponents, at times even resorting to bitter satire and personal innuendo. Indeed, in their internal disputes, as for instance in the polemics between Jacek Kuroń and Leszek Moczulski, there has been a good deal of acrimony.

Finally, today's "irrepressibles," like their predecessors, have displayed considerable optimism, often bordering upon wishful thinking. They fall here into the trap always waiting for political idealists. They believe that because they are right, they are bound ultimately to triumph. In doing so, however, they confuse what is desirable and what is possible. This was particularly evident during the euphoric "Solidarity" period, when they showed signs of increasingly losing touch with political reality.

In the manifold "Solidarity" papers, bulletins, and pamphlets, virtually all the components of political idealism from the first half of the twentieth century have reappeared. The conspiratorial and insurrectionist tradition was fully endorsed.²³ The uprising of 1863, the socialists' revolutionary activities in 1904-05, and the battles of the Piłsudski legionnaires during World War I were all uncritically praised. Keen interest was shown in the Polish military efforts during World War II, and especially in the struggles of the Home Army. When at the "Solidarity" Congress the well-known economist Professor Witold Trzeciakowski warned the young hotheads

21. See especially Leszek Kołakowski, "Tezy o nadziei i beznadziejności," *Kultura*, No. 6/285 (June 1971).

22. Andrzej Zagorza, "Ugoda, praca organiczna, myśl zaprzeczna," *Więź*, No. 9/209 (September 1975), p. 24.

23. Notably in the programmatic statement issued by the Polish Coalition for Independence in the spring of 1977: "Tradycja niepodległościowa i jej wrogość," *Tydzień Polski* (London), 23 April 1977.

against going too far, and illustrated his point by showing them his hand deformed by a bullet during the Warsaw uprising, he encountered an unexpected reaction: "So you took part in the uprising. How exciting! We wish we could go through an adventure like this too."²⁴

The political leaders who adhered to the idealist programmes in the past were revered. A veritable cult of Marshal Piłsudski emerged. His accomplishments in restoring an independent Polish state and his victory over the invading Red Army in 1920 were praised, while his dictatorial rule in 1926-35 was largely passed over in silence. Even the hapless Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły, who in 1935-39 demonstrated little talent either in military or in political affairs, was treated with considerable sympathy. In contrast, the political realists were submitted to harsh criticism. Special vehemence was reserved for the National Democrats and their leader, Roman Dmowski, even though his great contribution to the revival of an independent Poland in 1918 is beyond question.

Strong Polono-centrism, reminiscent of the Piłsudski years, re-emerged. Poland's significance in the international sphere was exaggerated. Traditional anti-Russian sentiments were revived. Historic Polish grievances against the Soviet Union, and especially the Katyń murder, were openly ventilated. Hopes for internal collapse of the USSR were entertained. There were exuberant expectations of Western support of Poland. With the coming to power of the Reagan administration many Poles looked to its renunciation of the Yalta agreement. They counted on the United States' diplomatic support and on its economic aid to bail them out of the economic crisis. In the fall of 1981 a well-known Catholic writer, Stefan Kisielewski, even ventured an opinion that a Soviet intervention in Poland could spark World War III.²⁵ At home the clandestine Polish Coalition for Independence, and *Kultura* abroad, advocated—what had been an anathema to the Poles during the entire post-war period—cooperation between Poland and West Germany against the USSR.²⁶ Towards the end of 1981 political idealism in Poland was not only alive, but rampant.

24. As related to this writer by Professor Trzeciakowski.

25. Kisiel, "Czy zanudzą na śmierć?", *Kultura*, No. 10/409 (October 1981), p. 130.

26. "Polska a Niemcy," *Tygodnik Polski*, 10 June 1978; "Apel Polaków do narodu niemieckiego," *Kultura*, No. 6/417 (June 1982), pp. 85-7.

VI

Similarities between the revival of political idealism at the turn of the century and that of the present are evident even in chronology. After the 1863 insurrection the first students' demonstrations in Warsaw took place in 1893; a workers' revolt, sparked by the Russo-Japanese war and the unrest in the Tsarist Empire, came in 1904. On 13 November, during a demonstration in the Polish capital, the revolutionaries resisted Russian troops with arms for the first time since 1864. Popular ferment continued for a year punctuated by recurrent bloody clashes. In October 1905 a general strike was declared and on 5 November 200,000 people took to the streets in Warsaw. In response, on 11 November martial law was introduced. Similarly, after the uprising of 1944 students' riots took place in 1968, and the massive workers' rebellion came in August 1980. It kept gathering in momentum until, in anticipation of a general strike and massive street demonstrations, martial law was declared on 13 December 1981.

The revolution of 1904-05 brought about a major split in Polish politics between the idealists and the realists. Józef Piłsudski, then still a leader of the Polish Socialist Party, tried to transform the ferment in the country into a full-fledged insurrection against Russia, and even sought Japanese assistance to that end. The socialists continued their revolutionary activities beyond the imposition of martial law; in fact, their terrorist squads kept attacking the occupant until 1908. In contrast, the National Democratic leader, Roman Dmowski, strove to exploit the occasion, although without much success, to broaden Polish autonomy within the Russian Empire. He strongly opposed the socialists' revolutionary tactics and, instead, adopted the stance of a legal opposition.

Soon the attention of the two Polish leaders turned to the impending conflict in Europe. Piłsudski moved to Galicia, where he began forming the Polish legions on the Austrian side. Meanwhile Dmowski, who considered Germany the major threat to Poland, continued his pro-Russian course. At the same time, however, he began to cultivate political contacts in France and Britain. Paradoxically, during World War I the efforts of the two men were largely complementary. By taking his legionnaires into battle on the Austrian side, although he ultimately turned against the Central Powers, Piłsudski established the Polish armed forces which were to be decisive in protecting the independent Polish state in 1918, and defending it against the Russians in 1920. Meanwhile, Dmowski made to the West, where, after winning from the Coalition the recognition of Poland's right to independence, he organized the Polish units fighting against

Germany on the French side. This secured for Poland a seat among the victorious powers at the Paris peace conference and helped it to regain its territories from Germany. Thus, in favourable international circumstances, both the idealist and realist approaches proved to be useful in regaining Poland's freedom.

A split similar to that following the revolution of 1904-05 is evident in Poland today. After the imposition of martial law—in a typical idealist reflex—various “Solidarity” groups went underground. Gradually they coordinated their activities and built an impressive national network, headed by the leaders who had evaded arrest in December 1981. Clandestine leaflets began to appear in large numbers and an underground radio station intermittently went on the air. Since late spring “Solidarity” has organized sporadic street demonstrations culminating in the widespread riots throughout the country on 31 August. There have been repeated clashes with the police resulting in many casualties, including several persons dead. So far, however, “Solidarity” has held back from violence. But its leader from the Cracow region, Władysław Hardek, reported “. . . the existence, deep in the underground, of groups which are ready for anything—even the most desperate steps They may resort to assassinations, destruction and sabotage.”²⁷

While “Solidarity’s” aspirations for reform of the existing system are shared by the overwhelming majority of Polish society, there are many Poles who harbour reservations about its increasingly radical tactics prior to December 1981, and even more, about its continued militant stance after the imposition of martial law. These were well articulated early in June in an address to the Polish Social-Catholic Association by its President, Janusz Zabłocki. He emphasized the determination of the Poles to press on with expansion of their freedom and called for an early lifting of martial law and the resumption of dialogue between the government and the people. At the same time, however, he appealed to his compatriots to avoid tensions and disorders which might lead to a fratricidal struggle. “It is necessary,” he argued in a realist vein, “to combine courage and reason. And reason dictates striving for goals which are feasible, so a futile waste of national resources leaving only a bitter aftertaste of defeat can be

27. Władysław Hardek, *Tygodnik Mazowsze* reprinted in *Informacja* (Montreal), No. 5, 21 July 1982, p. 5.

avoided.” The Poles ought to press for their goals, concluded Zabłocki, “. . . within the limits of the present political system exploiting all the legal opportunities for change existing in it.”²⁸

There is, of course, one more similarity between the situation in Poland in the first two decades of this century and today. On both occasions the fate of the Polish nation was profoundly affected by changes in the international sphere, and especially in Russia. The revolution in 1904-05 was sparked by the Russo-Japanese war and the resulting turmoil in the Tsarist Empire, and the rise of independent Poland in 1918 was assisted by Russia's defeats in World War I and the revolution of 1917. Poland's present position, however, is in two important respects, one favourable and the other detrimental, different. On the positive side there exists today a Polish state separate from Russia, enjoying restricted, but nevertheless real, autonomy. Most Poles understand that winning concessions from Polish generals should be easier than from Russian ones. On the negative side, however, no dramatic improvement in Poland's international situation, such as was produced by World War I, is in sight. There is no impending war in Europe (and in the nuclear age it would probably also spell a disaster for Poland), and internal evolution in the USSR has been painfully slow.

VII

The Polish political spectrum ranges from extreme idealism to extreme realism. At the idealist end the “Solidarity” leaders in hiding, and those who somehow managed to participate in the programmatic debates from internment, are all in agreement that the imposition of martial law left them no choice but to undertake clandestine activity, and that concessions from the military regime can be extracted only by intensifying popular pressure. They are divided, however, as to the specific tactics that the underground should follow as well as on their possible repercussions in Polish-Soviet relations.

The most radical position was adopted by Jacek Kuroń in a statement which was smuggled out from the Białołęka prison in the spring of 1982. He clearly believes that an ultimate showdown between the Communist government and the Polish people is inevitable and, in fact, will occur in the near future. To prepare for such an eventuality the underground should develop a strong, centralized organization and warn the authorities

28. “Kierunki dalszej pracy Związku—fragmenty referatu prezesa Zabłockiego,” *Ład*, 20 June 1982.

that, if necessary, “it will not refrain from violence.”²⁹ Kuroń was countered by Zbigniew Bujak, the leader of “Solidarity’s” Warsaw region, who anticipated a prolonged struggle—“trench warfare” as he labeled it—and favoured, if only to avoid easy detection by the police, a decentralized form of clandestine activities.³⁰

A member of the National Commission, Wiktor Kulerski, was even more circumspect and called merely for the development of an “underground society.” It should be a popular movement, he explained, “. . . decentralized, informal, composed of independent, loosely connected groups, circles, committees, etc., all of which would enjoy considerable autonomy and freedom of decision. It would provide regular assistance to persecuted people, assure the circulation of free information and thought, establish a network of social contacts, create educational opportunities, and offer moral and psychological encouragement.”³¹ A retrenchment in “Solidarity’s” goals, basically reducing them to what the democratic opposition did in the late 1970s, is evident in Kulerski’s statement.

Kuroń admitted that a major popular explosion involves the risk of a direct Soviet intervention. To prevent this from happening he suggested, in effect speaking as a shadow government, that the underground “Solidarity” should reassure the Russians that in the event of the overthrow of the present regime, Poland’s alliance with the USSR would be preserved.³² A “Solidarity” activist from Gdańsk, Aleksander Hall, argued, however, that there was no reason to believe that the Soviet Union would tolerate an overthrow of the Communist system in Poland. The underground’s objectives, then, “. . . should not be to remove the Communist party from power, but to compel it to extend concessions to the Polish people. This is not because we love the present government or accept its moral right to rule Poland, but because there is no other way. Anybody who fails to see this is indulging in lunar politics.”³³

29. Jacek Kuroń, “Macie złoty róg,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, in *Informacja*, No. 5, 21 July 1982, p. 7.

30. Zbigniew Bujak, “Walka pozycyjna,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, reprinted in *Trybuna* (London), No. 41/97, 1982, p. 27.

31. Wiktor Kulerski, “Trzecia możliwość,” *ibid.*, p. 30.

32. Jacek Kuroń, “Tezy o wyjściu z sytuacji bez wyjścia,” *ibid.*, p. 26.

33. Aleksander Hall, “Polemika z Kurońem,” *Solidarność* (Gdańsk), *ibid.*, p. 28.

At the centre of the political spectrum stands the Catholic church. Archbishop Glemp is following closely in the footsteps of his great predecessor, Cardinal Wyszyński, who taught his compatriots that it is often greater heroism to live for one's country than to die for it. Since December 1981 Glemp has been steadfastly urging the Communist government to resume dialogue with the Polish people, and has called for the release of all political prisoners and the restoration of "Solidarity." At the same time—even though this did not endear him to the "Solidarity" radicals—he stressed that the free trade unions must respect the existing system and refrain from assuming a political role.³⁴

Poland's external position was described by the Chairman of the Primate's Social Council and a prominent member of the "Znak" group, Professor Stanisław Stomma. In a speech delivered in April 1982 he was critical of the evolution of "Solidarity" from August 1980 to December 1981. "Solidarity" at first followed a moderate course, but then "... embraced an uncompromising struggle for sovereignty." The USSR, he argued, could accept substantial domestic changes in Poland, but only in so far as they remained within the limits of a "socialist system." "Such are the historical realities which pose a barrier to progress. They have to be understood and taken into account." The introduction of martial law, Stomma continued, has "... on the government side strengthened those who would like to suppress national aspirations altogether, and on the side of Polish society has produced emotional complexes and blind negation It would be a tragic illusion to count upon an overthrowing of the existing system and to try to get rid of dependence. Similarly, the roots of a tragedy could lie in the calculations, still active among the rulers, that they will succeed in suppressing social resistance Reason dictates that the only solution for both sides is a compromise."³⁵

At the realist end of the political spectrum there is the Communist party. It too is divided into moderate and radical wings. The party liberals hope that once the situation in the country has calmed down, restrictions on freedom can be lifted and the progress of reforms be resumed. The

34. For an account of the church's position since the introduction of martial law see Piotr Nitecki, "Kościół wobec napięć społecznych w Polsce," *Ład*, 20 June 1982.

35. Stanisław Stomma, "Komentarz do sytuacji" (Mimeographed, Warsaw). It is interesting to observe that the author, who in the late 1950s and 1960s was a leading theorist of "neo-positivism," in the 1970s moved closer to idealism, and now apparently has returned to his original position.

weekly *Polityka*, whose editor-in-chief is also a Deputy Premier, Mieczysław Rakowski, has candidly discussed many difficult problems existing under martial law and has advocated overcoming them by continued reforms. And after the demonstrations on 31 August the Director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Professor Jerzy Wiatr, insisted that there were no reasons for “. . . holding up the process of normalization and balking away from the policy of gradually lifting the martial law rigors.”³⁶

The party conservatives would prefer to use martial law not only to reverse the changes that were introduced during the “Solidarity” period, but also to suppress those that existed in the country prior to August 1980. Their spokesman, Rector of the Higher Party School of Social Sciences, Norbert Michta, has been highly critical of the tolerance shown towards the democratic opposition in the late 1970s, and the willingness to negotiate with the free trade unions in 1980-81, which “. . . put the party on the defensive and intensified in it the activities of the rightist-reformist elements.” The conservatives would probably welcome a violent confrontation with “Solidarity,” even if this would involve a Soviet intervention, to instill discipline into the Polish people. They would not be adverse to Poland’s being sovereign in name only, and, in reality a Soviet republic. “Exaggerating the national peculiarities,” wrote Michta, “could only lead to nationalism, undermining the very foundation of the entire Communist and workers’ movement, namely, internationalism.”³⁷

General Jaruzelski, so far, has tried to steer a middle course between the two opposed party wings. During his visit to Moscow in March 1982, he declared that “Poland was, is and will continue to be a socialist state” and that the “friendship and alliance with the USSR are the cornerstones of Poland’s foreign policy.”³⁸ But just before his departure from Warsaw he left the door open to domestic changes. “Martial law,” he asserted, “does not mean freezing the reforms. Despite all odds, we are determined to continue along this road.”³⁹ Jaruzelski, it seems, is genuinely convinced of the necessity of at least some internal changes. He would like to carry

36. “Pole Predicting Lifting Martial Law,” *The New York Times*, 12 September 1982.

37. Norbert Michta, “Rewolucja i kontrrewolucja w Polsce współczesnej,” *Argumenty*, 9-15 May 1982.

38. *Information Bulletin: Documents of the Communist and Workers’ Parties* (Prague), No. 8/456, 1982, p. 17.

39. “Referat wygłoszony przez I sekretarza KC PZPR gen. armii: Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego, *Słowo powszechne*, 25 February 1982.

them out on his own initiative, however, if only to preserve his prestige in Moscow. In July he expressed the hope that martial law could be lifted before the end of 1982, but he reserved the right to judge when the conditions would be ripe.

Jaruzelski's position, thus, resembles that of Margrave Wielopolski, who in 1863 proceeded to introduce reforms in Poland in a similarly autocratic fashion. This parallel was made clear (although Jaruzelski's name was politely not mentioned) by the editor-in-chief of the Catholic weekly *Ład*, Witold Olszewski. "In order to prevent the uprising Wielopolski, ignoring the psychological predilections of the nation, resorted to drastic means." By doing so he produced exactly the opposite outcome: ". . . he helped the uprising to break out, for its leaders acted in anger and desperation."⁴⁰ By high-handed policies Jaruzelski may yet bring about the same disastrous results.

VIII

In view of the polarization of the political forces in Poland, then, a repetition of the 1863 scenario must not be ruled out. The extreme idealists from "Solidarity" would be willing to expose the Polish people to substantial losses, while the extreme realists from the Communist party would accept, in effect, foregoing the Polish national identity. The two extremes, moreover, are mutually reinforcing. By blocking even moderate reforms, the party conservatives increase the risk of a desperate popular upheaval; while the "Solidarity" radicals, by aggravating tensions in the country, undermine the position of the proponents of reforms in the Communist party.

Yet, even if the worst comes to the worst, the experiences of those sixteen fateful months, from August 1980 to December 1981, will not be wasted. For "Solidarity," in articulating once more the Polish people's aspirations to freedom, has already earned a lasting place in national history, and it will serve as an inspiration to future generations. In this sense Professor Wereszycki is right in drawing a parallel between the events of 1863 and those of 1980-81.

The other possible outcome of the Polish crisis would be a repetition of the situation that followed the suppression of the revolution in 1904-05. Popular ferment may still continue for a while, but eventually some com-

40. Witold Olszewski, "Polskie myślenie," *Ład*, 27 June 1982.

promise, or truce, could be worked out. For at present there exists a clear stalemate in Poland. On the one hand "Solidarity," for all its popular support, is no match for the military regime. It is bound, therefore, to moderate its goals. On the other hand, short of a bloodbath, there is no way that the Communist government can totally suppress the activities of the "irrepressibles." Spontaneous resistance, at least in the way Kulerski envisaged it, is bound to go on. Without meeting the opposition half way, thus, the authorities would be involved in a protracted tug-of-war with the Polish people.

It must also not be forgotten that there are still considerable forces of moderation in Poland. They are present both in "Solidarity" and in the Communist party. Above all, there is the powerful Catholic church, clearly committed to a policy of national reconciliation. So, perhaps, over time, a compromise along the lines advocated by Professor Stomma will be possible.

In the long run the key to Poland's position, as always in the last two hundred years, lies in the international sphere. Only as a result of a major evolution in the Soviet bloc or a critical shift in European politics can Poland's situation be decisively improved. And as long as the principle of *Primat der Aussenpolitik* applies in Polish politics, the split between idealists and realists will persist too. Yet, this need not be necessarily in vain. For as the efforts of Piłsudski and Dmowski during World War II proved to be complementary, so the endeavours of the contemporary idealists, as well as of the realists, may both contribute to the rise of a future independent Poland.